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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet explains a child's Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) "Student Report for Parents/Guardians." In spring 1999, more than 210,000 students from grades 4, 8, and 10 in Massachusetts took the state's MCAS tests. All public students in grades 4, 8, and 10 are required to participate, and the Education Reform Law provides for no exemptions. Tests are given in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science & Technology, and History and Social Science (grades 8 and 10 only). The student report provides a page of information about the child's performance for each content area in which a child was tested. Each page shows the subject area, the performance level achieved by the student, the total score for the subject area, and a display of score and probably ranges of scores. The report explains the performance levels (Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Failing) with the score ranges for each level. Each page also shows how the student's performance compared with school, district, and state average scores. Comments about writing appear on the English language arts page of the student report. (SLD)

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MASSACHUSETTS COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

UNDERSTANDING THE 1999 MCAS STUDENT REPORT FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Massachusetts Department of Education

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Commissioner's Foreword

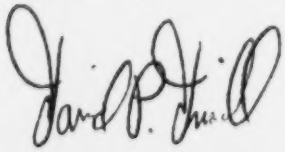
Dear Parents/Guardians:

This pamphlet is intended to further explain your child's MCAS *Student Report for Parents/Guardians*. Please use this pamphlet as you review your child's results to help you understand the information in the *Report*.

The MCAS tests are an important part of our state's effort to improve teaching and learning across the Commonwealth. It is vital that all parents and guardians understand the MCAS testing program so that they can work with their children's teachers to help their children succeed on future tests. The state is committed to working in partnership with schools to improve the academic achievement of your child and others across Massachusetts.

If you have questions after reviewing the *Student Report* and this pamphlet, please contact your child's school for assistance.

Sincerely,



David P. Driscoll

Commissioner of Education

Understanding the Student Report for Parents/Guardians

In the spring of 1999, your child was one of over 210,000 students from the fourth, eighth, and tenth grades in Massachusetts who took the state's MCAS tests. The enclosed *Student Report for Parents/Guardians*, which contains one page for each content area in which your child was tested, provides you with information about your child's performance on those tests.

This pamphlet is intended to further explain the *Student Report* and to supplement the information given in the *Report* about the MCAS tests.

Your child's test results show how well your child performed on the MCAS tests, which are based on the state's *Curriculum Framework* learning standards. These standards describe what Massachusetts students should know and be able to do in each subject area by grades 4, 8, and 10.

As you review your child's results, please keep in mind the following:

- The *Student Report* contains important information about your child's academic performance in the subjects tested by MCAS in the Spring 1999 administration. This report is *not* intended to *label* your child, but, rather, to describe his/her work in these subject areas based on the MCAS tests. Your interest and encouragement are essential in helping your child learn. The *Student Report* provides ideas about how to help your child do well in school.
- The MCAS test results are an important measure of your child's skills and knowledge. Use the MCAS results along with teacher evaluations and your child's day-to-day schoolwork to assess how well he/she is doing in school.

How will my child's test results be used?

- Your child's MCAS *Student Report* will become part of his/her temporary student record. Your child's temporary student record contains the majority of his/her student information and can be examined only by the student, his/her parents or guardians, and authorized school personnel. By law, a student's temporary record is destroyed no later than five years after the student transfers, graduates, or withdraws from the school system. For more information on this topic, see the Department of Education publication, *Student Records: Questions, Answers and Guidelines*, September 1995.

- Beginning in 2001, grade 10 students must pass the MCAS tests as one requirement for earning a high school diploma. Students will be given multiple opportunities, if necessary, to pass the tests between grade 10 and the end of their senior year. In addition to passing the MCAS tests, students must also meet local requirements for high school graduation, for example, successful completion of required coursework.
- Educators will use student, school, and district results extensively to review curriculum and instruction and plan for improvement. This will fulfill, in part, the intent of the Education Reform Law, which is to improve instruction and the achievement of Massachusetts students based on the *Curriculum Framework* learning standards.

What does it mean if the Student Report *indicates that my child was absent?*

All public school students in Massachusetts are required to complete the MCAS tests (see "Information about the MCAS Program" on page 8 of this pamphlet). The two 1999 test administration periods (April 26-30 for the English Language Arts Composition test and May 17-June 2 for tests in the other tested subject areas) allowed adequate time for schools to provide make-up testing for students who were absent from any original test session.

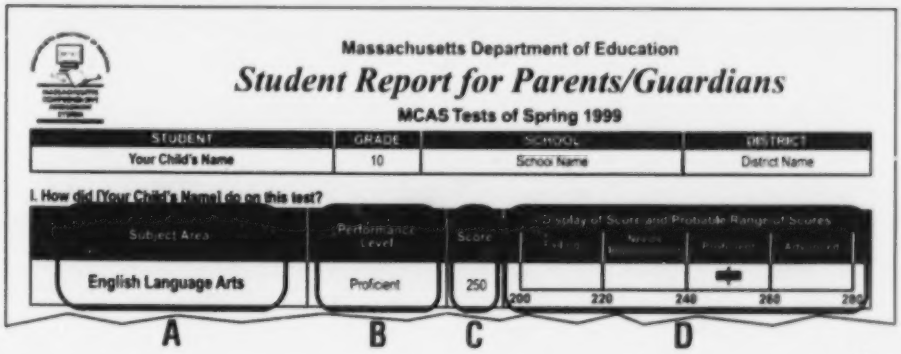
If your child did not complete a test or tests due to absence, he/she is reported as "absent" for each test that was not completed. Results from incomplete tests fall into the *Failing* category because no evidence of achievement is available. The results of students who are reported in the *Failing* category due to absence are included in the computation of school, district, and state results.

What does it mean if the Student Report *indicates that my child was "Not Tested"?*

A very small number of students were not tested because of their particular special education or limited English proficient (LEP) status (see "Information about the MCAS Program" on page 8 of this pamphlet). If your child is reported as "Not Tested," the report will not provide a score or performance level category. The results of students who are reported as "Not Tested" are not included in the computation of school, district, or state results. In the future, these students will be tested using alternate testing procedures currently being designed.

Guide to the Student Report for Parents/Guardians

Part I. How Did [Your Child's Name] Do on This Test?


Massachusetts Department of Education

Student Report for Parents/Guardians

MCAS Tests of Spring 1999

STUDENT	GRADE	SCHOOL	DISTRICT
Your Child's Name	10	School Name	District Name

I. How did [Your Child's Name] do on this test?

Subject Area	Performance Level	Score	Display of Score and Possible Range of Scores
English Language Arts	Proficient	250	200 220 240 260 280

A B C D

A. Subject Area

This section of each page in your child's *Student Report* shows the subject area for the test results reported on that page.

Student Reports for students in grades 4 and 10 will contain three pages (English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science & Technology).[1] *Student Reports* for students in grade 8 will contain four pages (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science & Technology, and History and Social Science).

B. Performance Level

This section of each page shows the performance level achieved by your child in this subject area.

MCAS results are reported according to four performance levels: ***Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement,*** and ***Failing.*** The score ranges for all performance levels are listed in Part II, "Performance Levels," of the *Student Report*, and are further explained on page 5 of this pamphlet. General descriptions of achievement in this subject area for each performance level are listed on the **reverse side** of the *Student Report* page, and are further explained on page 7 of this pamphlet.

[1] Grade 4 students participated in a History and Social Science Question Tryout in the Spring 1999 MCAS administration; no results were generated from or reported for that Tryout.

Grade 10 students were tested in the subject area of History and Social Science, but test results were only reported in *Test Item Analysis Reports* issued to schools. No performance levels or scaled scores were reported in 1999 for grade 10 History and Social Science.

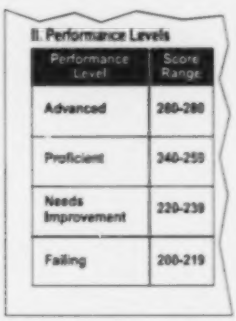
C. Score

This section shows your child's total score for this subject area.

D. Display of Score and Probable Range of Scores

The bar in this section ▬ shows where your child's score falls within the performance level range. The vertical line in the middle of the bar represents your child's score on this subject area test. The horizontal bar shows the range of scores your child might receive if the test were taken many times.

Part II. Performance Levels

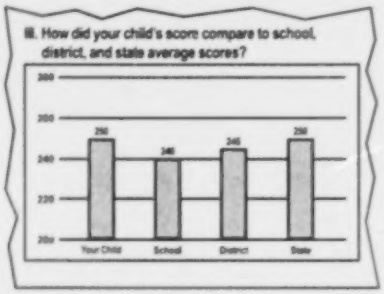


II. Performance Levels

Performance Level	Score Range
Advanced	260-280
Proficient	240-259
Needs Improvement	220-239
Failing	200-219

The score range for each MCAS performance level is shown in Part II. The "score range" shows the highest and lowest possible scores within each MCAS performance level.

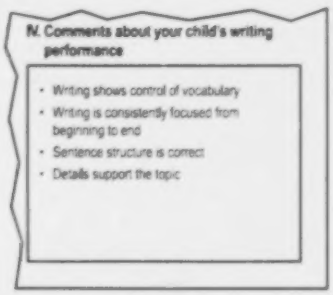
Part III. How Did Your Child's Score Compare to School, District, and State Average Scores?



Part III shows how well your child performed in this subject area compared to the average performance of students at the same grade in your child's school, your local school district, and the state overall.

Part IV. Comments About Your Child's Writing Performance

Please NOTE: Part IV only appears on the English Language Arts page of the *Student Report*.


IV. Comments about your child's writing performance
• Writing shows control of vocabulary
• Writing is consistently focused from beginning to end
• Sentence structure is correct
• Details support the topic

In 1999, students were given two separate English Language Arts tests: the English Language Arts Composition (Writing) test, administered April 26-30, and the English Language Arts Language and Literature (Reading) test, administered May 17-June 2. The student's results from both tests were combined to arrive at the Performance Level and Score shown in Part I of the *Student Report* English Language Arts page.

Each student's English Language Arts Composition was independently scored by two trained scorers. A list of possible comments about student writing was provided to the scorers. For each composition, the first scorer chose two comments and the second scorer chose either one or two comments. Part IV lists the comments chosen by scorers to describe this student's composition (duplicate comments appear only once). The entire list of possible scorer comments is available on the Department's Internet site at **www.doe.mass.edu/mcas.**

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Performance Level Definitions

Listed on the reverse side of each *Student Report* page are general performance level definitions in that page's subject area. These definitions describe expectations for student performance at the *Needs Improvement*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced* performance levels. Several categories of achievement for the subject area are listed in the row headings on the left; under each performance level, specific expectations are grouped within these categories. Student work that received a performance level of *Failing* did not meet the expectations described under *Needs Improvement*.

Information About the MCAS Program

What are the state testing requirements?

MCAS was designed to meet the requirements of the Education Reform Law of 1993. The law specified that the testing program must

- test all public school students in Massachusetts, including students with disabilities and/or students with limited English proficiency
- be administered annually in at least grades 4, 8, and 10
- measure performance based on the Massachusetts *Curriculum Framework* learning standards
- report on performance of individual students, schools, and districts
- provide a measure of accountability for students, schools, and districts (for example, beginning in 2001, grade 10 students must pass the grade 10 tests as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma)

What is tested on MCAS?

In the Spring 1999 administration, MCAS tested Massachusetts *Curriculum Framework* learning standards in the following subjects:

- *English Language Arts*
- *Mathematics*
- *Science & Technology*
- *History and Social Science* (grades 8 and 10 only; grade 10 results are only reported in one report issued to schools)

In the future, MCAS will also test *History and Social Science Curriculum Framework* learning standards at grade 5 and learning standards in the *Foreign Languages Curriculum Framework*.

Who must participate?

All public school students in grade 4, 8, and 10 must take part in MCAS testing. The Education Reform Law provides for no exemptions from taking the MCAS tests. This policy assures that all Massachusetts public school students have the opportunity to learn the materials covered by the *Curriculum Framework* learning standards.

The Department is currently designing alternate testing procedures for students with disabilities who cannot be tested using accommodations and for students with limited English proficiency who have attended public schools in the United States for three or fewer years.

What types of questions appear on MCAS?

Multiple-choice questions are used in all subject area tests except the English Language Arts Composition test. Students select an answer from four options.

Open-response questions are used in all subject area tests except the English Language Arts Composition test. Depending on the subject area tested, students create a written response of one or two paragraphs, or create a chart, table, diagram, illustration, or graph.

Short-answer questions are currently used only in Mathematics tests. Students generate a brief response, usually a short statement of numeric solution leading to a computation.

Writing prompts are used only in English Language Arts Composition tests. In each tested grade level, students write a composition in response to a single writing prompt.

Related Department Publications

The following publications, as well as other Department of Education publications, are available on the Department's Internet site at **www.doe.mass.edu/mcas**. Many are also available at your local public library.

- *Curriculum Frameworks* in *English Language Arts* (1997); *Mathematics* (1996); *Science & Technology* (1996); and *History and Social Science* (1997) describe what students should know and be able to do at various grade spans.
- *The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: UPDATE–Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities* (1999) outlines the requirements for participation and acceptable accommodations for students with disabilities.
- *The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Release of Spring 1999 Test Items* (1999) contains all of the test questions from the 1999 MCAS tests that were used as the basis for student results.
- *Question and Answer Guide on the Statewide Testing Program* (1998) contains basic information for parents and the general public on the testing program.
- *A Student's Question and Answer Guide on the Statewide Testing Program* (1998) contains basic information on the testing program.
- *Student Records: Questions, Answers and Guidelines* (1995) contains information about the Massachusetts Student Record Regulations.